

The Necessity Of The Atonement

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The scriptures plainly teach the necessity of the sufferings and death of Christ: "the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and of the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31). "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:14,15). "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day" (Lk. 24:46). "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead" (Acts 17:2,3).

These, and many other passages, clearly teach that the passion of our Lord was necessary; and the inquiry naturally arises: What is the ground of this necessity? Why was it needful that Christ should suffer and die? If it be said, that "the scriptures might not be broken --that the Old-Testament prophecies respecting the Messiah might be fulfilled," then we

ask: Whence the necessity for these prophecies, unless there was a prior necessity for the thing predicted? Why did God before show, "by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer," unless his sufferings were foreseen to be necessary? If, again, it be said that the necessity for Christ's passion was in "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," then our inquiry is only carried back another step: Why was it necessary that God should, beforehand, determine to deliver up his only-begotten Son, to suffering and to death? Whence the necessity for a divine purpose that should include the humiliation and mortal agonies of the "Word," that "was in the beginning with God?" If, from this point, we step back upon the fatalist's ground, and recognize an absolute necessity, higher than God, binding his will and all its issues, with the chain of an inexorable destiny, then our inquiry is at an end: Christ's death was necessary in the same sense, and for the same reason, that all things are necessary. But if we regard the divine will as free, and all its purposes as spontaneous and self-determined, then the way is still open to pursue our inquiry touching the ground of the necessity for the Saviour's passion. And the inquiry now becomes teleological. God had some definite end in view when he freely purposed, predicted, and effected, the death of Christ; and he purposed, predicted, and effected it, because it was a necessary means to that end. What was that end? It was -- we suppose all will agree in saying -- proximately, the salvation of sinful men, and ultimately the promotion of his own glory, through the salvation of sinful men. If the atonement was necessary at all, it was necessary as the means of recovering men from a state of sinful alienation from God. The fact that the whole human race is, by nature, thus alienated, we assume, as indisputable. And it is with reference to the reconciliation of sinners with God, and their final salvation, that the scriptures affirm a necessity for the sufferings and death of Christ.

But why was an atonement necessary -- this is the form our inquiry now assumes -- in order that men might be reconciled and saved? Is it suggested that we are here entering a region of useless and unsafe speculation, and that it were better to be content with the revealed fact, and not perplex ourselves about the reasons for it? But since this divinely revealed fact, that an atonement was necessary, in order to human salvation, appeals to that divinely implanted instinct within us, which ever prompts us to go back of facts and search for hidden reasons and underlying principles, and without which there would be nothing worthy of

the name of science or philosophy, it cannot be improper for us to inquire why Christ "must needs suffer," provided our investigations are conducted with an humble and reverent spirit. Moreover, such an inquiry will tend to give definiteness and value to our views of the nature of the atonement. We miss much of the real significance of the fact that Christ died to save sinners, until we discern the true ground or reason for the necessity of his death.

There are three different theories concerning the necessity of the Atonement, which, for convenience, may be designated as "The Moral-influence theory," "The Satisfaction theory," and "The Governmental theory."

It is proposed to examine the respective claims of these three theories, in order.

1. The Moral-influence Theory.

The two essential points in this theory are: first, that repentance and spiritual renewal on the part of sinners, constitute the only necessary and actual ground of their pardon and salvation; and, secondly, that the death of Christ was necessary to furnish and bring to bear effectually, on sinful men, those moral influences which were needful to lead them to repentance and effect in them a thorough renovation of character. [1]

This, for substance, was the theory advocated by Abelard in the twelfth century; [2] and by Socinus in the sixteenth century, [3] and has been held by the great body of modern Unitarians, although some of them admit that the death of Christ may have been necessary for some unknown purpose, besides that of exerting upon men renovating influences. [4]

This theory is manifestly correct in affirming the necessity of repentance and true holiness, as an indispensable condition of forgiveness and salvation. All Christians agree on this point. The scriptures are too explicit here to leave any possible room for diversity of opinion. Men must repent or perish; be born again or be excluded from the kingdom of heaven.

This theory is unquestionably right in affirming that pardon and eternal life are pledged to all who do sincerely repent and turn to God, and "walk in newness of life." When the prophet proclaims: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa.55:7), the apostle responds: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." (Acts 10:34, 35).

This theory is right also, beyond dispute, in affirming the life and death of Christ to be preeminently the source of those moral influences which lead men to forsake their sins, and to "put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness." By his clearer and fuller manifestation of God; by his lucid enunciation of the most profound spiritual truths; by his restoration to the race of the last ideal of humanity; by the sublime and melting spectacle of his final sufferings in Gethsemane, and on Calvary, he became emphatically "the power of God unto salvation." There are no motives so mighty and subduing, as those drawn from the work of him "who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."

But while this "moral-influence theory" thus includes important elements of truth, it seems to us radically defective, both on philosophical and scriptural grounds.

(a) It virtually denies that there is any real and universal necessity for the work of Christ. If men would repent under other moral influences than those introduced by Christ, then, according to this theory, his work were unnecessary. And can it be proved, or justly assumed, that no sinner ever did, or ever will become truly penitent, except through the moral influences emanating from the life and sufferings of Jesus? The advocates of this theory would probably be the last to consign the whole heathen world to perdition, rejecting the belief, or hope, common to nearly all Christians, that some who never heard the name of Christ, nor felt the influence of a single motive, drawn from his teachings or example, or death, will be spiritually renewed and saved. For all such, if such there be, Christ's work was, of course, in no sense necessary. They are not indebted to it, in any way, for their salvation, and will be unable to join, at

last, in that "new song," saying: "Thou art worthy, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God, by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

(b) This theory detracts from the real moral power of the atonement, by making its designed efficacy and value to consist exclusively in its moral power. Whatever is confessedly done, or endured, solely to impress or influence us, becomes, for that very reason, comparatively uninfluential. We are not readily moved by that which we know has no end but to move us. Sufferings endured only to furnish us with an example of patience and fortitude, have less power to inspire us with a spirit of patient and heroic endurance, than sufferings necessarily involved in securing some end, connected with interests higher than our own. Moreover, this theory, by denying that there is a necessity for any other ground of forgiveness than repentance, tends to enfeeble men's ideas of the evil of sin and the sacredness of law; and consequently of the riches of divine love and justice, so marvellously blended in the cross; and thus it robs the atoning work of Christ of not a little of that power over the conscience and heart which, we conceive, really belongs to it.

It might seem invidious, in confirmation of these remarks, to appeal to facts; but we cannot suppress the conviction that such an appeal would furnish evidence that this theory, which makes the sole value of the atonement to consist in its renovating, life-giving power, does not actually render that doctrine as influential for good as a different theory does.

(c) According to this theory, the work of Christ has no peculiar efficacy as a means of human salvation. It saves men only in the same sense that everything does, which exerts upon them any good moral influence. In kind, its saving efficacy is the same as that of every act of true self-denial or self-sacrifice for the sake of others. Christ is only a saviour, not the Saviour. His claims to that title are not exclusive. He merely stands at the head of a great company of the wise and good of all ages, who, by their unselfish labors, and holy example, and self-immolation, have won men from the downward path of sin to the upward path of virtue. But can any candid reader of the scriptures fail to receive the impression, clear and strong, that the salvation of sinners is a work in which Christ has no rival? that what he did and suffered had an efficacy altogether peculiar? that he alone, properly bears the name Saviour, --Jesus, because he alone saves his people from their sins? (Matt. 1:21.)

(d) This theory does not satisfy the awakened moral judgment of men. Feeble and inadequate convictions of sin may allow the sinner to rest content with his own real or supposed penitence, and his new right purposes and endeavors. But let his conscience be quickened and made sensitive; let him have a deep sense of the "exceeding sinfulness of sin," as committed against a holy God, and in violation of his righteous law; and then, when his penitence is deepest, and his purposes of amendment strongest, will he be the least satisfied with these, as a ground of pardon and of reconciliation with God; and will most earnestly demand something more, something out of himself, and wholly beyond his power to supply. This sense of sin, reaching forth after an objective atonement or ground of justification, and demanding something besides repentance, to honor the violated law and satisfy the lawgiver, is a reality, as the experience of untold multitudes will attest; is one of the profoundest realities in the experience of, we venture to say, the great majority of those who begin a truly religious life; and is a protest of their moral nature against the theory, that the only necessity and design of Christ's atonement was to induce men to repent, and exchange an ungodly for a godly life.

(e) This theory offers no facile and satisfactory explanation of numerous passages of scripture which connect the salvation of men with the work of Christ:

1. Those passages which explicitly affirm the impossibility of salvation except by Christ: "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must (dei) be saved" (Acts 4:12). "For other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). By these texts, the possibility of being saved, except by Christ, is most clearly and decidedly excluded. If, then, Christ saves only by the moral influence of his life and death, he can save none who have no knowledge of him; and hence the countless millions who never hear of Christ will, without exception, perish. The advocates of this theory, then, are obliged to put an unnatural and forced construction upon passages like the above, or else believe, what many of them certainly do not believe, that not one of the human race, who is wholly ignorant of Christ, will ever repent and be saved.

2. Those passages which ascribe to Christ's death a retrospective efficacy: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in

his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past" (Rom. 3:25). Olshausen says the words hamartemata progegonota "can only mean the sins of the world before Christ's coming." [5] Stuart adopts the same interpretation, and says: "The parallel of this remarkable and most cheering and animating sentiment is to be found in Heb. 9:15. It is implied in other passages of the N. T. not unfrequently." [6] But how can the moral influence of Christ's death be retrospective, or in any conceivable way tend to secure the remission of sins committed ages before his advent? The above interpretation of these passages, which certainly seems to be the true one, is utterly inconsistent with the moral-influence theory of the atonement.

3. Those passages which imply that Christ died for all mankind: "Because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead" (2 Cor. 5:14). "Who gave himself, a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim. 2:6). "That he, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). "And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn. 2:2). How could language express the universality of the atonement, more clearly and strongly? It is impossible, by any just rules of exegesis, to exclude from such passages their natural and obvious meaning, that Christ died for the whole human race. But how can this be, if the whole efficacy of his death consists in its moral influence? That influence certainly does not, and was not designed to, reach all men. There is no sense in which, according to this theory, Christ is a "propitiation for the sins of the whole world;" or "tasted death for every man." If he died for all, then must his death have a value other than that which consists in its power to lead men to repentance.

4. Those passages which clearly teach that the sufferings and death of Christ were, in some sense, vicarious or substitutionary: "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for(huper) the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). "I delivered unto you, first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for(huper) our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). "Who gave himself for(huper) our sins" (Gal. 1:4). "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for(huper) us" (Gal 3:13). "Who gave himself a ransom for(huper) all" (1 Tim. 2:6). "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for(huper) us" (Rom.5:6). "Who, his own self, bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Pet.2:24). "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement

of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa.51:5). It is not easy to conceive how language could, more distinctly and unequivocally, express the idea that, in some sense, Christ was a substitute for sinners -- suffered in their stead. But the idea of substitution must be eradicated from these and kindred passages, before they can be made to favor the idea that Christ died only to exert upon men a good moral influence, fitted to lead them to repentance.

5. Those passages which represent the death of Christ as a sacrifice or propitiatory offering: "As Christ also hath loved us, and given himself for us, an offering (prosthoran) and a sacrifice (?usian) to God" (Eph. 5:2.) "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin" (Hebrew word). "And he is the propitiation (hilasmos) for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn. 2:2). "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation (hilasterion), [7] through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past" (Rom. 3:25). The sacrificial idea cannot be excluded from these passages; and no figurative interpretation can be put upon them, which does not yet clearly imply that the death of Christ had an efficacy objective and Godward. Neither a literal nor a figurative sacrifice, or sin-offering, suggests the idea of subjective moral influence. Such terms as "sacrifice," "propitiation," "sin-offering," seem wholly foreign to the theory under review; and their use by the sacred writers is inexplicable, if this be the true theory of the atonement. More inapposite terms could scarcely be found, to denote that the sole efficacy of Christ's death consists in the good moral influence which it exerts upon men in turning them away from their iniquities.

2. The Satisfaction Theory.

The question is: Why was the atonement necessary to secure the pardon and salvation of sinners? According to the theory we are now to consider, it was necessary to satisfy, appease, or conciliate the distributive justice of God. Other important ends, it is conceded, are answered by the atonement: it has a governmental value, honoring the divine law, and sustaining the divine authority. It meets a demand of the human

conscience, bringing peace to the guilty; and it furnishes the most powerful motives to induce men to turn from sin to holiness. But, according to this theory, these are secondary and incidental ends. The prime design of the atonement was to afford satisfaction to divine justice, or the "ethical nature" of God. Sin awakens the divine anger, which demands the punishment of the sinner; but is satisfied with the substituted punishment of Christ, and permits the divine mercy to save the sinner from his deserved doom.

The germs of this theory are found in the writings of Augustine, and several of the early Fathers. The view of the atonement, however, that prevailed for several centuries, coming into prominence during the third and fourth, seems to have been, that it was necessary to satisfy Satan, rather than God; was a price paid to redeem, or buy off, sinners from the just claims which Satan had upon them in consequence of their sins. [8]

But as Manichaeism disappeared, and a more rational view of demoniacal agency began to prevail, a new theory of the Atonement became indispensable, and was gradually developed. Christ's death came to be regarded as a satisfaction, not to Satan, but to God himself. Anselm of Canterbury was one of the first and ablest advocates of the new theory; although in his hands it did not assume the precise form in which it was subsequently, and is still, held. It has, indeed, been denied that Anselm held the modern doctrine that Christ's sufferings were an expiatory sacrifice substituted for the punishment of sinners to satisfy divine justice. [9]

Still there can be little doubt that between the satisfaction theory which has extensively prevailed in the church during the last five or six centuries, and the theory of the Archbishop of Canterbury, there is a close genealogical connection. The general idea of satisfaction rendered to God's violated honor, by the whole work of Christ, was gradually reduced to a more specific idea of satisfaction to God's distributive justice by the penal sufferings of Christ substituted for those of sinners. Those who hold this theory differ on some of the minor points involved, but agree in regard to its main features which are: (1) Sin is inherently hateful and ill-deserving: (2) God, as a being of perfect holiness, necessarily hates all sin, as such: (3) God by a constitutional necessity of his nature is inexorably obligated to manifest his hatred of sin by inflicting the punishment which it deserves: (4) This deserved and inflicted punishment

satisfies and this alone can satisfy the divine hatred of sin, or distributive justice: (5) By bearing this deserved punishment in the place of sinners, Christ gave the required satisfaction to the divine justice, and thereby laid the ground for the pardon and salvation of them that believe. This theory certainly has much to commend it to our belief. By its profounder views of sin, and of the divine holiness; and its juster interpretation of many passages of scripture, it possesses decided advantages over the theory which resolves the whole efficacy of the Atonement into a moral power to lead men to forsake sin, and turn to God. It is evidently right in affirming that sin is intrinsically hateful and ill-deserving; that it is an evil per se, and not merely on account of its tendencies, and consequences. This we hold to be a fundamental point in all our ethical and theological inquiries. The doctrine that sin is only a relative and not an essential and intrinsic evil, does not, in our view, accord either with the facts of consciousness, or the teachings of the Bible, and is calculated to vitiate our reasoning on many important topics.

Again, this theory is undeniably right in affirming that God necessarily hates sin. He can neither love, nor be indifferent to what is, in its own nature, hateful. The emotions of a perfect being must perfectly correspond to the true qualities of things. It is not optional with him whether or not, to feel complacency in what is pure and lovely, or displacency in what is impure and hateful. Even if sin were only a relative evil, God would necessarily hate it as such. As he must be pleased with what tends to promote the highest welfare of his creatures, so must he be displeased with what tends to interfere with their highest welfare. He must, therefore, hate sin with a double hatred; hate it on account of its intrinsic hatefulness, and on account of its evil tendencies. On two of its fundamental points, then, we cordially accept the theory now under notice. But when we come to its third point, we are unable to yield our assent; and here we will commence the statement of our objections to this theory of the Atonement:

1. It rests upon the false assumption that God is, by a constitutional necessity, obligated to express his hatred of sin, by the infliction of deserved punishment. We call this an assumption, because we do not find it anywhere proved or distinctly argued, but everywhere taken for granted. It is really a double assumption. It is assumed, first, that God must give expression to his hatred of sin; and, secondly, that he must do

so in one particular way, viz., by the infliction of deserved punishment. We call it a false assumption, because we see no good reason for believing it to be true, but many weighty reasons for believing it not to be true. It is admitted that sin deserves punishment, but how does the simple desert of punishment necessitate its infliction? It is admitted that God must hate sin, but how does his necessary hatred of sin involve any necessity for its expression, and especially any necessity for its expression in the form of judicial punishment? Why may not the displace emotion exist without having a penal expression? Why may it not be suppressed, if there appear any good and sufficient reason why it should be? How does its bare existence in the mind of God necessitate him to manifest it by inflicting the evil which sin that awakened it, merits? Against this assumption that there is, in the very nature of God's emotion of displeasure at sin, a necessity for its exercise in the actual infliction of deserved punishment, we bring forward the fact that there is not, in any of the other constitutional emotions of God, an inherent necessity for their exercise or expression towards the objects which awaken them. The commiserative emotion excited in the divine mind by human suffering, does not inexorably obligate God to relieve that suffering. Were it so, there would be no suffering unrelieved, neither in this world nor in the world to come. But there is suffering which God commiserates, but does not relieve. He suppresses the emotion which it awakens, for wise and benevolent reasons, and permits his creatures to suffer, yea, causes them to suffer, often long and severely. Why may he not for similar reasons, lay a like restraint upon the judicial emotion awakened by human sinfulness? Is it said that the preeminence of this emotion over all others, creates a necessity for its expression which does not exist in their case? But has this emotion of displeasure at sin any such preeminence? Wherein does it consist? How shall we weigh one of the divine emotions against another, and say this is superior to that? If we were thus to estimate them, and arrange them according to their relative dignity or value, would not the affectionate and sympathetic emotions rank at least as high as the ethical or judicial emotion?

It is sometimes said that the latter is more fundamental and central in the divine nature than the others; that it is constitutional, while they are voluntary; so that we can say "God must hate sin, must be just;" but we cannot say, "God must be merciful, must show pity." [10]

This statement manifestly proceeds upon an imperfect analysis, and a mistaken conception of the divine attributes. We hesitate not to deny that justice is any more a fundamental attribute, any more constitutional or involuntary, than are love, pity, and that whole "class of attributes which are antithetic to it." In all the moral attributes of God, there is a voluntary and an involuntary element. There is the constitutional retributive sentiment and impulse, as the basis of justice; and there is the constitutional benevolent sentiment and impulse as the basis of love and mercy; and the latter is just as essential and fundamental in the godhead, just as involuntary and indefeasible as the former. Both exist and must exist, where the correlated objects exist. We can just as easily conceive of God as being destitute of the one as of the other; as easily conceive of him as looking down upon sin without any displacent emotion, or any impulse to punish it, as conceive of him as looking down upon suffering without any benevolent emotion, or any impulse to relieve it. These two emotions, as involuntary and necessary, are upon a level in point of dignity and importance, being alike essential parts of an infinite nature. Neither is conditioned upon, nor limited by, the other. They may coexist harmoniously in the same mind, and in respect to the same person, if he be both a sinner and a sufferer. The simultaneous expression or gratification of them both, in such a case may be impossible; and if the question then arise, which of the two shall be gratified, and which repressed, the answer must be sought elsewhere than in the nature of the emotions themselves. Neither has any such inherent superiority as to entitle it to indulgence at the expense of the other. The judicial emotion cannot rightfully stride forward to reach its own private ends, by trampling down compassion by sheer force; neither can compassion stride forward to reach its own private ends by trampling down justice by sheer force. These emotions can reach, and take effect on their objects, only through the consenting action of the will. But the divine will surely will not arbitrarily, or from blind partiality, gratify one of these emotional impulses and deny the other; nor is it necessitated to gratify either. It can for good reasons restrain and deny them both temporarily or permanently. As a matter of fact it does thus lay restraint upon the compassionate impulse, and will continue to do so, as long as there is unrelieved suffering in the world, or a lost spirit in hell. And what God thus can do, and actually does, to one department of his emotional nature, there is every reason to believe he can do to every other department. Even if his judicial emotions were more intense than his benevolent emotions (of which we have not a

shadow of evidence), this would be no proof that the former must be gratified rather than the latter. The mere strength or intensity of any involuntary feeling cannot justify, much less, necessitate its voluntary exercise and expression. Here, no more than elsewhere, does might make right. The justifying reason for all moral conduct is to be found elsewhere than in the mere strength of those constitutional impulses which prompt to it, whether those impulses be retributive or commiserative.

The foregoing argument against the assumption that there is in the very nature of God's emotional hatred of sin a necessity for its expression in the actual infliction of deserved punishment, is confirmed by an appeal to the operations of the human conscience.

There must be such a correspondence between the moral constitution of man and the moral constitution of God as to render it legitimate to reason from the one to the other. Now can we, indeed, know anything about the divine attributes, or have any conception of them, unless we reason from ourselves, from the finite to the infinite? The emotions of the human conscience towards sin must be the same in kind as those which sin awakens in the mind of God, else we are wholly ignorant what those emotions are. This judicial faculty must represent or interpret to us the judicial nature of God, else we know nothing about that nature. What, then, is the testimony of conscience to the point in hand? Do its displace emotions towards sin involve a necessity for their gratification? We may examine these emotions with reference to the individual's own sins, or with reference to the sins of others. A man commits a sin. Its commission is attended or followed by an emotion of displacency towards the sin, and also by an emotion or sense of personal ill-desert. The former emotion is in kind the same that God has towards it. The sin is displeasing to, and is condemned by, both God and the sinner's own conscience. Thus far all is clear. The action of conscience assures us that God hates the sin. But what does the sinner's sense of personal ill-desert signify? Clearly this, that God regards him as ill-deserving; and the more this feeling of ill-desert is intensified, the more clearly does it intimate the strength of the retributive sentiment in the divine mind toward him. And is not this the whole of the positive testimony of conscience in the case? Does it in anyway, directly or indirectly, tell him that God must of necessity inflict upon him deserved punishment? It tells him that God

may punish him, that it would be right for him to do so, and hence awakens the fear that he will. The disquietude and misery which it thus sometimes causes, and which the criminal sometimes vainly hopes to get rid of, by voluntarily surrendering himself to the penalty of the violated civil law, may be regarded as a premonition of coming punishment, or as a part of the punishment itself already inflicted. In either case, it only attests the fact, or certainty of punishment, but says nothing about God's being "inexorably obligated to inflict it," by the very nature of his constitutional hatred of it, and sense of its ill-desert.

Let us then examine the operations of conscience in regard to sin committed, not by the individual himself, but by others. A godly man, we will suppose, witnesses the commission of a heinous offence by a fellowman. He immediately experiences a strong emotion of displeasure at it. He abhors it, hates it with perfect hatred, and pronounces the author of it deserving of severe punishment. The retributive impulse awakened within him is strong. But is this a sufficient reason why he should indulge it? Does the very nature of the emotion alone obligate him to give it expression in penal form? Must he, as an individual, impelled by a burning sense of the criminal's ill-desert, execute justice upon him? Must he not rather repress and deny his emotional impulses, and leave it for some one who, having the same emotional impulses, finds in his official capacity and relations as ruler, good and sufficient reasons to justify him in gratifying them, by inflicting the deserved punishment? Is it not evident that the mere existence of these involuntary judicial emotions of conscience involves no necessity for their voluntary indulgence and expression? and is not the inference legitimate that the mere existence of corresponding emotions in God involve no such necessity on his part? Our first objection, therefore, to the theory under review seems valid, viz.: that it rests on the false assumption that, because God necessarily hates sin on account of its inherent ill-desert, therefore he must necessarily punish it as it deserves.

2. Our second objection to this theory is, that logically it precludes the possibility of Christ's sufferings being substituted for the penalty due to sin. It is indeed sometimes claimed that this is the only theory of the Atonement that fully retains the idea of vicariousness, or substitution. On the contrary, we maintain that logically, the idea of vicariousness is, by this theory, rendered utterly impossible. God's organic hatred of sin, it is

said, imperatively demands the implication of punishment. But what punishment? not punishment in general, but the precise punishment which the sin that awakened it deserves. And inflicted on whom? not anybody at random, but the identical sinner whose sin has rendered him deserving of it. It is his sin alone that has awakened God's judicial wrath; it is his punishment alone that that wrath necessarily demands, if it demand anything. Now to say that a substituted or vicarious punishment will satisfy this demand of divine wrath, is to say that that wrath can be satisfied with something which it does not imperatively demand; which is only another way of admitting that it does not imperatively demand the infliction of the punishment of the sin that excited it. If something else may take the place of that specific penalty which the displace emotion of God towards sin demands, then there is not in the emotion itself an immanent necessity for the infliction of that penalty; or if there is any such necessity for its infliction, then the substitution of something else for it is out of the question. To say that there may be a substituted penalty, provided it be strictly equivalent to that whose place it takes, is to say nothing to the purpose. Equivalent, i. e., equally efficacious -- for what? Why of course to satisfy the divine displeasure. And if something else will satisfy that displeasure just as well as the deserved punishment itself, then it does not really demand that punishment, but only demands to be satisfied with something. But what evidence have we that a substituted penalty can, in any case, stand so correlated to the judicial emotion excited by sin, as to meet and satisfy it? We here appeal again to the testimony of the human conscience. What does the awakened conscience of the sinner demand? So far as it demands anything, it demands, not the punishment of another person, but of the sinner himself. The penal suffering of another person in his stead does not satisfy his own sense of ill-desert, for that was not what it demanded. It is sometimes said by the defenders of this theory that punishment is the correlate to guilt, just as a liquid is the correlate to thirst. But is the liquid drunk by one person a correlate to the thirst of another person? Does my neighbor's eager draught from the sparkling cup, tend in the least to assuage my burning appetite? Can there be a satisfactory vicarious drinking? So far then as this analogy holds between the cravings of conscience and the cravings of the bodily appetite, it disproves the efficacy or the possibility of vicarious punishment as an expiation of guilt. It can no more satisfy the sinner's judicial thirst to have another person punished for him, than it can satisfy his physical thirst to have another

person drink for him. A vicarious endurance of penalty is not what the guilty conscience demands, any more than a vicarious drinking is what the parched lips and tongue demand. The demand of conscience is just as clear and definite in regard to the person who shall suffer, as it is in regard to the penalty to be suffered; and if in regard to the latter it is inexorable and must be met, then for the same reason it is inexorable and must be met in regard to the former; if there can be no substitution in regard to the penalty to be inflicted; if nothing but the penalty will answer the purpose, then can there be no substitution in regard to the person on whom it shall be inflicted; nothing but its infliction on the sinner himself will answer the purpose.

If, then, what we have called the false assumption on which this theory of the Atonement rests, be not false but true, a logical deduction from it is, the absolute impossibility of a vicarious Atonement, and of course the absolute impossibility that, in any case, the deserved penalty should be remitted, or the sinner saved from the extremest rigor of its infliction.

3. But if it can be shown that the foregoing objection is not valid, and that a vicarious penalty is possible, then we object to this theory in the third place, that it leaves no room for a literal and true pardon of sin.

Pardon is the gracious remission of deserved penalty. But, according to this theory, the penalty is not, and in no case can be, remitted; it is, and must be, in every instance of sin, endured to the last jot or tittle, either by the sinner, in his own person, or in the person of his substitute. In the case of the elect, they have suffered the full penalty in the person of Christ, their surety or substitute. And by this vicarious punishment, all the claims of justice on them are as fully cancelled as if it had not been vicarious. "It leaves nothing unsatisfied, either in God's moral nature or man's moral sense." Their debt is wholly paid; their sin is thoroughly expiated; and of course there can be, for them, only a nominal pardon. How can a debt that is already paid, or a sin that is already punished, be said (except figuratively) to be forgiven? Or how can God, who has already exacted punishment for a sin, to his entire satisfaction, be said to forgive it? There is no longer any penalty due to the sin, and of course there is none to remit. The non-infliction of penalty in such a case is, in no proper sense of the word, pardon. It is an act of justice, not of grace. The believer can boldly claim it as a right, and need not humbly sue for it as a gracious favor. In attempting to obviate this objection, by showing

that the payment of a penal debt by a surety does not, like the similar payment of a pecuniary debt, set at liberty the debtor, Turretin is compelled to admit that the suffering of Christ was not the precise penalty of the law: was a vicarious suffering, not a vicarious penalty. [11] But many do not shrink from accepting the conclusion to which their premises logically conduct them: that exemption from punishment, in his own person is the believer's right, and may, in justice, be claimed by him as such. We occasionally meet with language, like the following from President Edwards: "The justice of God, that required man's damnation, and seemed inconsistent with his salvation, now as much requires the salvation of those that believe in Christ, as ever before it required their damnation. Salvation is an absolute debt, to the believer, from God; so that he may, in justice, demand it, on account of what his Surety has done. For Christ has satisfied his justice fully for his sin; so that it is but a thing that maybe challenged, that God should release the believer from punishment; it is but a piece of justice that the creditor should release the debtor, when he has fully paid the debt." [12] If such language is to be regarded as only a strong figurative expression of the author's conviction of the security of the believer and the certainty of his salvation in virtue of Christ's work in his behalf, very well; but if it is to be taken in its literal sense (and if used by an advocate of this theory, it should be understood literally), then does it admit that there is no such thing, under the divine government, as the proper pardon of sin, or remission of penalty; and that the believer's exemption from punishment is not due, directly, to an act of divine sovereign grace, but to a mere act of divine justice; and is only what he can, and should, unhindered by a "false humility," demand as his right.

4. The last objection we will here urge against this theory is, that it leads, by a logical necessity, either to the doctrine of a limited atonement, on the one hand; or, to the doctrine of universal salvation, on the other.

They, and only they, for whom Christ endured the penalty due to their sins, and satisfied the distributive justice of God, will be saved. If Christ bore the literal penalty for all men, then all men are exempt from obligation to bear it themselves. If God's holy wrath against the sins of all men is perfectly pacified and satisfied, then has he no longer any wrath to visit upon any of the race; and, of course, will exclude none from salvation, and subject none to eternal punishment. Is it said, that though

the atonement be made for all, yet God "is at perfect liberty to apply it to whom he pleases, or not to apply it at all?" But so far as the atonement relates to God, and the satisfaction of his judicial wrath, it is applied when made: the very making of it is its application. God, by it, inflicts the punishment which satisfies his emotional justice; and when he has once, to his entire satisfaction, punished a sin, surely he cannot, in virtue of his mere sovereignty, demand a duplicate punishment of that same sin. To punish twice for the same offence, is not the prerogative of a righteous sovereign, but the arbitrary and unjust exercise of power which characterizes the tyrant. It follows then, inevitably, that if Christ literally bore the penalty, and satisfied the divine distributive justice, for all men, all men will be saved; if the atonement, in this sense, was universal, there is no way of logically avoiding the conclusion, that salvation will be universal. On the other hand, if only a certain part of mankind, the elect, will actually be saved, then the inference is as logical and irresistible, that the atonement is not general, but limited; that Christ bore the penalty, and satisfied the retributive justice of God, not for the whole, but only for a definite number of the race.

Thus this theory, consistently held, necessitates a belief either in the doctrine of universal salvation, or the doctrine of a limited atonement. Some of its ablest expounders frankly admit this. Thus Symington says: "the Supreme Being gives to every one his due. This principle cannot be violated, in a single instance. He cannot, according to this, either remit sin without satisfaction, or punish sin where satisfaction for it has been received. The one is as inconsistent with equity as the other. If the punishment for sin has been borne, the remission of the offence follows of course. The principles of rectitude suppose this; nay, peremptorily demand it; justice could not be satisfied without it. Agreeably to this reasoning it follows, that the death of Christ being a legal satisfaction for sin, all for whom he died must enjoy the remission of their offences. It is as much at variance with strict justice, or equity, that any for whom Christ has given satisfaction should continue under condemnation, as that they should have been delivered from guilt without a satisfaction being given for them at all. But it is admitted that all are not delivered from the punishment of sin; that there are many who perish in final condemnation. We are, therefore, compelled to infer that for such, no satisfaction has been given to the claims of infinite justice --no atonement has been made. If this is denied, the monstrous impossibility must be maintained,

that the infallible judge refuses to remit the punishment of some for whose offences he has received a full compensation; that he finally condemns some, the price of whose deliverance from condemnation has been paid to him; that, with regard to the sins of some of mankind, he seeks satisfaction in their personal punishment, after having obtained satisfaction for them in the sufferings of Christ: that is to say, that an infinitely righteous God takes double payment for the same debt, double satisfaction for the same offence -- first, from the surety, and then, from those for whom the surety stood bound. It is needless to add, that these conclusions are revolting to every right feeling of equity, and must be totally inapplicable to the procedure of him who "loveth righteousness and hateth wickedness." [13] We see no possible way, while rejecting the unscriptural doctrine of universal salvation and holding to the scriptural doctrine of a universal atonement by Christ, to avoid Mr. Symington's "revolting conclusions," except by rejecting, as false, his premises, that sin cannot be remitted without satisfaction to the retributive justice of God, and that Christ rendered such satisfaction by enduring the literal penalty due to sin.

To our minds, therefore, this satisfaction-theory of the atonement, while it includes many valuable elements of truth, is quite unsatisfactory.

3. The Governmental Theory.

This theory places the necessity of the atonement of Christ in the exigencies of God's moral government; not in the demand of an involuntary organic emotion of retributive justice, common to God and man. The atonement was necessary for the same reason, precisely, that the penalty annexed to the divine law was necessary; it takes the place of that penalty, in respect to those who repent and are forgiven; answers the same end as would have been answered by the infliction of the penalty, viz. maintains the law and authority of God, and by maintaining that law and authority promotes those great interests for which moral government exists. Hugo Grotius was, probably, the first man who distinctly stated and defended the fundamental principles of this theory. His design was to defend the satisfaction-theory against the Socinians, his work being

entitled "Defensio fidei Catholicae de Satisfactione Christi." The result, however, was, that he actually rejected the foundation-principle of that theory, and argued that the satisfaction of Christ was rendered, not to the distributive, but to the governmental, justice of God. [14] But Grotius does not seem to have proceeded in this line of argument any further than he was compelled to by the force of Socinian objections against the common doctrine of the church. He did not develop a complete and consistent governmental theory of the atonement; nor, after him, does there appear to have been any material progress made towards the full development of such a theory, for more than a century and a half. The Catholic view on the one hand, or the Socinian view on the other, generally prevailed. It was reserved for certain New England divines of the last century, first clearly to state and defend, as a whole, what has been variously called the new-school theory, the Edwardean theory, the Hopkinsian theory, the consistent theory; or, more commonly and appropriately, the governmental theory. To Dr. Jonathan Edwards, more than to any other man, belongs the honor of giving to the world this new theory of the atonement. His three celebrated sermons on the subject, published in 1785, which marked an era in the history of this doctrine, contain, perhaps, the most thorough exposition and defence of that theory which has yet been made. The elder Edwards, and his intimate friends Bellamy and Hopkins, by their suggestive discussion of the subject, while retaining the general features of the old view, yet contributed not a little to the development of the new view. They furnished the premises from which the younger Edwards reasoned to his conclusion. Among those eminent divines who early accepted the governmental theory, and helped give it currency, were Smalley, Maxey, Burge, Dwight, Griffin, Emmons, and Spring; who, though differing on minor points, were yet agreed in holding and advocating the essential principles on which the theory rests. It now holds a recognized place in that doctrinal system which is distinctively called "New England theology." It is "extensively advocated by American and English divines, often practically believed where it is not theoretically acknowledged, and promising to become the prevailing faith of evangelical thinkers." According to this theory, the atonement was necessary in order to vindicate and sustain the divine law, and thus enable God, as a wise and benevolent Ruler, to remit the penalty due to sin, and save sinners, on condition of their repentance and faith. Some of the principles involved in this general statement are: (1) That God is a wise and benevolent ruler. (2) That, as such, he must vindicate and

maintain the authority of his law. (3) That the annexed penalty is for the purpose of vindicating and maintaining his law. (4) That the sufferings of Christ were not, literally and strictly, the penalty of the law, but a substitute for it, and an equivalent, i.e. had the same efficacy in respect to the divine law and government that the penalty was designed to have, and would have if inflicted, in cases where it is remitted. (5) That the atonement renders the salvation of all men possible: removing those obstacles which law and justice interposed, and leaving nothing but impenitence and unbelief to hinder any from being forgiven and saved. (6) That the atonement does not obligate God, in the exercise of justice, to save any; but enables him, that is, makes it safe and consistent for him, in the exercise of sovereign grace, to save the penitent and believing.

Among the general arguments urged in support of this theory, the following may here be mentioned:

1. It is scriptural. We do not mean that it is, anywhere, formally stated, in the inspired writings; for this is not true of any theory of the atonement. Revelation, like nature, gives us facts, not theories. But a theory may be called scriptural, when it harmonizes with all the statements, and includes all the facts, of scripture. Such, we fully believe, is the case with this governmental theory of the atonement. It harmonizes with all those passages which ascribe to the work of Christ peculiar moral efficacy. It goes along with the sacred writers in all they say respecting the power of the cross to constrain men to repent and turn to God. It even claims to invest the cross with a moral power superior to that ascribed to it by those who affirm that the scriptures make its whole value and efficacy to consist in this. On the other hand, it harmonizes with all those passages which teach that the atonement related to God as well as to man; those that teach that it was vicarious, that Christ suffered for, or in the stead of, sinners; those that teach that it was to disclose or manifest the righteousness of God, while remitting sins; those that teach that the blood or death of Christ was preeminently that which secured pardon and salvation for men; those that teach that it originated in the love of God, and was the fullest expression of that love; those that represent the actual pardon of penitents, on account of the atonement, to be an act of free, sovereign grace; those that teach the universality of the atonement, i.e., that Christ died for all men, and brought salvation within the reach of

all; those that speak of Christ's bearing our sins and being made a curse for us; and those that speak of Christ's death as a propitiation for sin. These last two classes we place last on the list for the purpose of offering a few remarks upon them, in justification of the assertion that the governmental theory harmonizes perfectly with their true meaning; for these are the only classes of texts which, with any shadow of plausibility, can be urged against the theory. The passages to which we especially refer, as constituting one of these classes, are such as the following: "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). "He bare the sin of many" (Isa. 53:12). "Who, his own self, bare our sins, in his own body, on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24). "For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). To these inspired statements do the advocates of the satisfaction-theory appeal, to prove that Christ did endure the literal penalty of the law for those who are actually redeemed; and hence to disprove one of the fundamental principles of the governmental theory.

Without entering into exegetical detail, it will be sufficient to our purpose to observe, in regard to this class of texts:

(a) They cannot be interpreted literally. Our sins were not so transferred to Christ that he literally bore them. Christ was not literally "made to be sin," much less, made to be a sinner. Neither was he literally "made a curse," much less, accursed. The boldest literalist has never yet gone so far as to insist that the scriptures teach that Christ was actually changed, from a human and divine person, into "sin," and into "a curse." Some have, indeed, held that these passages teach that our sins were literally laid upon Christ, or so transferred to him, that they became his, and made him a sinner. [15] This literal interpretation, however, is almost universally rejected, as shocking to our moral sense and contrary to the plain declarations of the Bible, that Christ was "without sin," "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."

(b) Since we must interpret these passages other than literally, there is nothing to forbid an interpretation of them accordant with the theory that Christ did not endure the exact and literal penalty of the law. If we may say, that the expression "bear our sins" means "endured the penalty due to our sins," then may we as well say that it means "endured sufferings in

the place of the penalty due to our sins." If we may say that in the phrase "made to be sin for us," sin means not sin, nor sinner, but one who endures the punishment due to sin, then may we as well, yea, with far better exegetical reason, regard 'ësin,' as employed according to Hebrew usage, in the sense of a sin-offering, which is not penalty, but a substitute for penalty. And if we may say that in the phrase "made a curse for us," curse means not curse, but one cursed, or punished, then may we as well say, that it means one who suffered, as if he were guilty and accursed, according to the saying, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree;" which is only saying that Christ was subjected to the ignominious death of crucifixion, endured what is regarded as the highest curse of human laws, in order that he might redeem us from the more terrible curse of the divine law. [16]

It is not denied that the foregoing passages, if taken by themselves, are susceptible of an interpretation in harmony with the theory that Christ endured the literal and exact penalty due to the sins of those for whom he died; but it is claimed that they are susceptible, on sound exegetical principles, of a different interpretation; while our confident belief is, that other scriptural representations and the very nature of the case, necessitate a very different interpretation.

The other class of texts above referred to, as those which are often cited as inconsistent with the governmental theory, are such as these: "And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn. 2:2). "He loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 4:10). "Whom God had set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood for the remission of sins that are past" (Rom. 3:25). "A propitiation," it is said, cannot be a mere governmental expedient, since it refers directly and exclusively to God himself, -- to his very nature, not to his government, and by satisfying his distributive justice renders him placable or propitious. But what is meant by rendering God placable or propitious? Is not God always placable, or propitious towards sinners in the sense of always regarding them with emotions of kindness and love? Is not the Atonement itself a product and proof of his love for sinful men? This is generally conceded by the advocates of the satisfaction theory. "The infinite pity of God," they say, "is yearning with a fathomless desire to save the transgressor, even before an atonement is made." In his feelings, then, God is already

propitious towards sinners. All that is needful is that his propitious feelings be exercised or expressed in propitious acts. And if the Atonement enables God consistently to act according to his desire to save transgressors, then may it truly be called a "propitiation" and be said to propitiate God, since it renders him not only emotionally but actually propitious. And this is just what, according to the governmental theory, the atonement does. It renders it consistent for God, as the supreme Ruler, to manifest his love in actually saving men from their deserved doom. In the words of one who usually argues against this theory, "it is never regarded as necessary to produce in God love towards men, but as necessary to his love being manifested. It is not looked upon as that which renders God placable, but as that which renders the exercise of his placability consistent with the other perfections of his nature. It does not procure the divine favor, but makes way for this favor being shown in the pardon of sin." [17] And whatever does thus "make way" for the manifestation of divine love, and the exercise of the divine placability, in the actual pardon of sin, is, in the scriptural sense, a "propitiation," being that which renders God practically propitious. And such a "propitiation," we most fully believe, Christ was, according to the above declarations of Paul and John.

This theory of the atonement, then, we regard as not only in no respect unscriptural, but as, in all respects, eminently scriptural, including and harmonizing all the inspired statements relating to the subject.

2. This governmental theory accords with, and is founded upon, just and consistent views of the divine character. This, of course, must be true of every scriptural and correct doctrine or theory. One strong objection to the two theories of the atonement which we have previously examined, and that lies against them both, is, that they are based upon defective or false views of the character of God. The "moral-influence theory" exalts the sympathetic and benevolent emotions of God to the supreme place; while the "satisfaction theory" gives the same place to the retributive emotions. The former makes the exercise of emotional justice conditioned upon, and limited by, emotional love; the latter makes the exercise of emotional love conditioned upon, and limited by, emotional justice. The one says: "God is merciful, and therefore can forgive sin on the simple condition of repentance;" the other says: "God is just, and therefore cannot forgive even the penitent, except on condition that his

own justice be satisfied by the infliction of the deserved penalty." The one says: "because God loves the sinner, he must save him;" the other says: "because God hates sin, he must punish it." Both agree in making the mere existence of involuntary emotions a justifying and even necessitating reason for their full expression; and in this point of agreement, they are both alike in error. As we have already shown, in another part of this Article, there is not, in the nature of any involuntary emotion in the divine mind, a necessity for its voluntary manifestation. There may be such a necessity, but it exists elsewhere than in the inherent nature of the emotion itself, independently of any other consideration. According to the views of many eminent divines on this subject, that principle or attribute of God, which is central and controlling, is voluntary benevolence or love. This comprises all his moral perfections. "God is love." Voluntary justice, mercy, grace, pity, and forbearance are only different modifications of this comprehensive excellence. These are to love, what the various colors of the spectrum are to pure light. [18] This benevolent love is the spring of all the divine actions. It presides over all organic emotions or constitutional impulses, and decides which must be expressed in action, and which must be repressed. If the question arise: "Shall sinners be saved?" it is not enough to refer it to the commiserative emotions, on the one hand, nor to the retributive emotions, on the other; but it must be referred to love, whose decision will be determined by a wise regard to the highest good of the universe, including of course the highest good of the Creator himself. If love says that, on condition sinners repent, the commiserative emotions can be indulged, without endangering the highest good, then penitent sinners may be saved, and the retributive emotions must be denied. If love says, the highest good requires that the retributive emotions be indulged by the infliction of the literal and exact penalty due to sin, then sinners cannot be saved, and the commiserative emotions must be denied. If love says that, by the vicarious sufferings of Christ, the highest good can be secured without inflicting the penalty on those who repent, it being inflicted on those who will not repent, then penitent sinners can be saved, both the retributive and commiserative emotions being partially gratified, and partially denied.

This view of God, which makes benevolence the all comprehensive excellence of his character; which resolves all other moral attributes into this; which represents the infinite One as actuated never by blind

constitutional impulses, but always by wise and benevolent considerations; which makes divine mercy more than a mere amiable weakness, and divine justice more than mere unamiable sternness, -- this view of God is commended to us both by reason and revelation: by a sound philosophy, and an appeal to the infallible word. And the fact that the governmental theory of the atonement fully accords with this philosophical and scriptural view of the divine character as no other theory does, furnishes to our minds a strong argument in favor of it.

3. This theory harmonizes perfectly with just views of the nature and design of moral law and government.

Moral government is the government of moral beings by means of moral law. Moral law consists of two equally essential parts: (a) an authoritative rule of action for those who are the subjects of it; and (b) appropriate sanctions to enforce the same. What is the ultimate end or design of such a law? It must embody or express some intelligent purpose of the lawgiver, or moral governor. And if he be a perfect moral governor, it must embody a benevolent purpose; that is, a purpose to promote thereby the highest good of the universe, including the highest good of both the governor and the governed. If the moral law of God did not spring from and embody such a benevolent purpose, it must spring from and embody, either a purpose that is malevolent, or a purpose that is indifferent, being neither benevolent nor malevolent. But in this case a malevolent purpose is out of the question; but not more so than is an indifferent purpose; for an intelligent moral purpose that is, in this sense, indifferent, is in the nature of things an impossibility. In establishing over his intelligent creatures, then, his moral government, by the promulgation of his law, God was actuated by a benevolent purpose, and had in view a benevolent end, viz. the highest general good. And this benevolent purpose determined both parts of the law, the preceptive and the confirmative. What, then, must be the nature of these two essential parts of the moral law, respectively, in order that they may fulfil the benevolent purpose from which they spring, or answer the benevolent end for which they are designed?

The preceptive part must: (a) recognize the essential and immutable distinction between the morally right and the morally wrong; for, precepts based on mere expediency, could not be authoritative, and therefore could not tend to secure the great end of moral law; and (b) require of all

creatures perfect holiness, forbidding all sin; because perfect holiness is inherently right and excellent; and, being inherently right and excellent, is indispensable to the highest good; and because sin is inherently wrong and evil, and being inherently wrong and evil, tends to interfere with the highest good of the universe; and (c) express the lawgiver's preference of the things required, to those forbidden; not merely his recognition of an essential difference between holiness and sin, but his intelligent preference, based on that essential difference.

A law that thus requires perfect holiness, because God chooses it on account of its own intrinsic excellence, is a law that, so far as respects its preceptive part, is fitted to promote the highest good of the universe; and is promulgated by God because of its adaptation to that end.

The confirmative part of a moral law (that is, its sanctions) is twofold: a promised reward, and a threatened punishment. In the case of the divine law, the promised reward is eternal life. Its language is: "this do, and thou shalt live." Perfect, sinless obedience, from the beginning, would ensure eternal life to every subject of that law. This eternal life, being the strongest motive which any promise could present to secure obedience, is made a part of the law, because it tends to enforce its precepts, and so helps adapt the law to answer the great benevolent end of moral government. Could any other motive, in the form of a reward more efficient, be found, it might be substituted for this, and be made the promissory sanction of the law. All that is necessary is, that that sanction of this kind be employed which will best enforce the law, and make it subserve the highest good. The penal sanction, or threatened punishment, must have the same benevolent design with the promissory sanction, and with the preceptive part of the law itself. To answer this benevolent design, the penalty must be: (a) suffering; (b) suffering to be inflicted by the lawgiver; (c) suffering to be inflicted, by the lawgiver, upon the violator of law, and for the violation of law; (d) suffering to be inflicted, by the lawgiver, upon the sinner, proportioned to the degree of his sinfulness; (e) suffering to be thus inflicted, by the lawgiver, as an expression of his hatred of sin and estimate of its intrinsic ill-desert. Such a penalty is an essential part of the moral law; and, without it, law would be, not law, but mere unauthoritative advice. It is just as important as the precept itself; just as necessary as moral government is; unless there can be found a substitute which will be equally efficacious as a sanction of

law. For the sole function of penalty is that of a legal sanction. Its sole value is its efficacy to enforce the law and maintain its authority, and so ultimately help promote the great benevolent ends of moral government. [19] The moral law, then, is benevolent, both in its precepts and its sanctions, as a whole; it sprung from a benevolent purpose, and had a benevolent design.

Now the governmental theory of an atonement is commended to our belief by its perfect harmony with this view of the nature and design of moral law, and government. According to this theory, the atonement was necessary for the same reason that penalty was necessary. It is a substitute for the penalty of the law, which is remitted in the case of all who repent and turn to God. It takes the place of the penal sanction, and answers the same end which that sanction was designed to answer; that is, is equally expressive of God's regard for his law and his sense of the intrinsic demerit of sin, and so has the same efficacy to maintain his moral government and help secure the great object for which that government was established. This theory, we maintain, harmonizes as no other theory on the subject does, with all our just conceptions of moral law and government. It harmonizes with a just conception of the origin and end of law as emanating from a divine purpose to promote, by means of it, the highest good of the universe. It harmonizes with a just conception of the law as a rule of action, recognizing its claims as immutable, and as based on an immutable distinction between right and wrong, sin and holiness. It harmonizes with a just conception of penalty, as a legal sanction, designed to sustain the authority of the law, and therefore not remissible on the ground of mere repentance; but remissible on the ground that a substitute has been provided equally efficacious in sustaining the authority of law. It, further, harmonizes with a just conception of penalty as something which cannot justly be inflicted except for the very sin, and on the very sinner, that deserves it; nor be inflicted twice for the same offence. It harmonizes with a just conception of the demands of law, as being the demands, not of some abstract, independent, and impersonal thing, that works by an inherent necessity, and is inexorable in its exaction of punishment; but of a wise and benevolent lawgiver, who is above the law, who can remit his just demand for punishment, provided a substitute for that punishment can be found which shall fully maintain all the sanctities of the law, and so enable him, through it, to secure the highest good of the universe, the very

object he had in view in promulgating the law and in annexing to it a penalty. A theory which thus harmonizes, better than any other, with our fundamental ideas of moral law and government, is by that very fact strongly commended to our acceptance.

4. This theory duly recognizes the distinction between a moral being and a moral governor.

A man can, consistently, do many things as a mere man, which he cannot, consistently, do as a ruler. Not his character alone, but his official position, must be taken into the account, before we can decide what he can or cannot, must or must not, do. A kind father, as a father, can forgive his son the crime of theft, but cannot punish him for it, i. e. inflict the penalty of civil law; but as a ruler he cannot consult merely his parental sympathies, but must punish his son if the public good require him to do so. As father he can forgive, but cannot punish; as ruler he can punish, but cannot forgive, unless the welfare of the state will permit.

So God, as a holy being merely, could do some things which he cannot do as supreme Ruler; and can do some things as supreme Ruler, nay is obliged to do some things which, as a merely holy being, he would not be obliged to do, nor could rightfully do. To forgive may be consistent with his paternal feelings, but not with his official position; to punish may be consistent with his official position, but not with his paternal feelings. When, therefore, the question before us relates to the pardon or punishment of men, it is not enough to say that God is kind and compassionate, and therefore will not rigidly inflict the penalty due to their sins, nor to say that he is holy and just, and therefore must inflict the penalty. We have to consider not only the fact that he is compassionate, and the fact that he is holy, but also the fact that he is the Ruler of the universe, and as such will forgive or punish, as the highest interests of that universe require or forbid.

This theory of the atonement fully recognizes this distinction between a moral being and a moral governor, and therefore rejects the idea that, because God is good, and loves sinners, he must for that reason alone forgive and save them, on the simple condition of repentance; and rejects, also, the idea that, because God hates sin, he must, for that reason alone, inflict the punishment it deserves. It finds the necessity of punishment, and so of the atonement, not in the simple fact that God is a

just and holy being; but in the fact that he is a just and holy sovereign; not in the inherent demands of his own moral nature, but in the demands of his moral government. [20]

This Article has already extended too far to permit us to present other arguments, which might be brought forward in favor of the governmental theory of the atonement. We will, in conclusion, barely advert to a few objections which have been urged against this theory, though most of these have been anticipated in the course of the discussion.

1. It is said that this theory contradicts our conception of God, as a being absolutely independent and self-sufficient, the reasons of whose acts are not without, but within, himself; that it subordinates God to the creature, and makes the good of the creature the end that determines his actions.

This objection is founded wholly on a misapprehension. The advocates of this theory fully hold that the ultimate reasons of God's actions are within himself: "that for him and through him and to him are all things." When they affirm that the highest good of the universe is the end God has in view in establishing and administering his moral government, they do not deny that he acts from reasons within himself, any more than they deny this, who say that he punishes sin because it is sin and deserves punishment. In both cases there is something objective in view. If, when he is supposed to act from the promptings of retributive justice in punishing sin as it deserves, the ultimate reason is subjective; why is it not subjective, also, when he is supposed to act from the promptings of benevolence in promoting the highest good of the universe? Furthermore, by "the highest good of the universe," is not meant the highest good of creatures merely, but the highest good of the Creator also. And surely it does not conflict with any just view of the independence and self-sufficiency of God to suppose that, while in the exercise of the highest conceivable benevolence, he regards his own highest good according to its real value, he also regards the good of his creatures according to its real value. That his own glory is the chief end of God in all that he does, is readily conceded; but this does not forbid that the welfare of his creatures may be a subordinate end; in securing his own glory, he may necessarily have to regard the welfare of his creatures; his glory may, in part, consist in the promotion of their welfare. It is, therefore, only by misapprehending the governmental theory of the atonement, that any one can be led to allege that it fails to exalt God as

the beginning and end of all things.

2. It is objected to this theory that it denies the justice of God, by resolving it into benevolence. As well might it be objected that the philosopher denies the existence of the various colors of the rainbow, when he affirms that they are only modifications of pure light. But what is justice? In the concrete, it is the actual infliction of deserved punishment, and the actual bestowment of merited reward. But this theory certainly does not deny that God never rewards and punishes any of his creatures as they deserve. As an attribute of a moral being, justice includes a retributive sentiment which is constitutional, and a voluntary disposition to render to all according to their desert. But this theory certainly does not deny that God has such an involuntary sentiment, and such a voluntary disposition. On the contrary, it ascribes to him justice in this sense as fully as any other theory does. It affirms that God is disposed to treat his creatures as they deserve; but that, inasmuch as this disposition is voluntary, its expression is regulated by benevolent considerations, or by a regard to the highest good of the universe: if that highest good demand its expression, in the literal infliction of punishment, then it is expressed in that way; but if that highest good demand its suppression, or its expression in some other way, e. g. by an atonement, then it maybe suppressed, or expressed in that way; but this, surely, is no denial of the divine justice.

3. It is objected to this theory, that it represents the justice of God as forever unsatisfied. And what if it be so? May not justice go unsatisfied, as well as any other attribute of God? He who supposes that God is, in every sense, and in respect to his whole being, perfectly satisfied with everything in the universe; that is, feels perfect complacency in everything, is one with whom it were idle to argue. But in what sense does this theory deny that divine justice is satisfied? It denies that it is satisfied in any such sense that it would be unjust in God to inflict the penalty, due to sin, on those for whom an atonement has been made. But it affirms that divine justice is satisfied in the sense that it interposes no obstacle to the salvation of all men. Seeing the same good end answered by the atonement, which would have been answered by the infliction of the penalty, it no longer demands the punishment of those who trust in the atonement, and is satisfied not to demand their punishment. "Divine justice is not a blind principle, aiming at no end: much less a malevolent

principle, aiming at a bad end, and delighting to inflict needless pain." "If the ends to be answered by punishment absolutely require that sinners, in their own persons, should suffer a great and endless misery, justice will be satisfied with nothing short of that. If the important ends which justice aims at, can be accomplished by a small punishment, it is satisfied with a small punishment. And if all the ends of punishment are perfectly and safely accomplished in another way, that is, by the sufferings of a substitute; then justice is satisfied with that, and as well satisfied as it could be by the merited punishment of sinners themselves. In this last case it is satisfied, not by the execution of the penalty of the law upon sinners, but by something else of as much value, something which answers all the ends aimed at as well." [21] In this sense, then, is divine justice satisfied, viz. that a just God is satisfied to secure the ends of justice by atonement rather than by the execution of the penalty on penitent sinners.

4. It is objected to this theory, that if, as it claims, the highest good be the end of punishment, then should the innocent be punished instead of the guilty, if that good could be better promoted thereby.

It is enough to reply, that the supposition can never be a reality. The punishment of the innocent never could promote the highest good, because it would be injustice; and injustice cannot even consist with the highest good, much less promote it. It is because punishment is inflicted only on the guilty and for their guilt, that it sustains law, and so has any efficacy whatever to promote the welfare of the universe. This objection, we cannot refrain from adding, comes with ill grace from those who insist that the innocent may be punished instead of the guilty, and that the chief value of the atonement is derived from the fact that an innocent person actually was punished instead of the guilty; that Christ literally endured the penalty due to sinners.

The theory of the atonement which we have advocated, was elaborated by those holy and eminent men of God who, in the last century, under the stimulating influence of that prince of divines, the Elder Edwards, and, in conjunction with him, made those invaluable "improvements in theology," which became new and impregnable bulwarks around the beleaguered citadel of our faith. Distant be the day when the New England churches shall abandon these strong defences to the enemy, and retreat again within the old, and not a little shattered, fortifications.

NOTE:

[1] It may, perhaps, be thought by some that the advocates of this theory wholly deny the doctrine of the Atonement, and should have been passed by in this discussion. But as they generally claim to hold to an Atonement, and apply this term to the work of Christ in saving men, and affirm that work to have been necessary to human salvation, we prefer to devote a brief space to a consideration of their theory.

[2] Keander's Ch. Hist., Torrey's Trans. Vol. IV., p. 502.

[3] Hagenbach Hist. Doctrines, Vol. II., p. 341.

[4] "We have no desire to conceal the fact that a difference of opinion exists among us in regard to an interesting part of Christ's mediation; I mean in regard to the precise influence of his death on our forgiveness. Many suppose that this event contributes to our pardon, as it was the principal means of confirming his religion, and of giving it power over the mind; in other words, that it procures forgiveness by leading to that repentance and virtue which is the great and only condition on which forgiveness is bestowed. Many of us are dissatisfied with this explanation, and think that the scriptures ascribe the remission of sins to Christ's death, with an emphasis so peculiar that we ought to consider this event as having a special influence in removing punishment, though the scriptures may not reveal the way in which it contributes to this end" (Channing's Works, Vol. III., p. 88). "His [Christ's] death stands forth as no other event does in the world's history, and exerts a power that nothing else has. That power is spiritual and for man. We say not there can be no other power then; but if there be, it is not for us to define" (Rev. E. B. Hall, D. D., Relig. Mag. Vol. XV., p. 256).

[5] Com. in loco.

[6] Com. in loco.

[7] "As sin offering," De Wette. "Expiatory sacrifice," Tholuck.

[8] "In Irenaeus, the sufferings of Christ are represented as having a necessary connection with the rightful deliverance of man from the power of Satan. The divine justice is here displayed in allowing even Satan to

have his due. Of satisfaction done by the sufferings of Christ to the divine justice, as yet not the slightest mention is to be found" (Neander's Ch. Hist. Vol. I., p. 642). "This theory was first adopted by the Grecian Church, and especially by Origen (Com. in Matt. XX., et alibi), through whose influence it became prevalent and was adopted at length by Basilius, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzen, Nestorius, and others. From the Greeks it was communicated to the Latins, among whom it was distinctly held by Ambrosius, and afterwards by Augustine, through whose influence it was rendered almost universal in the Latin Church" (Knapp's theology, p. 401). See also, Hagenback's Hist. Doctrines, Vol. II., pp. 192-3.

[9] "The idea of a punishment by which satisfaction is made, and which is suffered in the room of another, does not occur in the scheme of Anselm." Bauer, quoted by Hagenback (Hist. Doct. Vol. II., p. 38). Far from Anselm was the idea of a satisfaction by suffering, or an expiation by assuming the punishment of mankind; for the satisfaction which Christ afforded by what he did was certainly according to Anselm's doctrine, to be the restoration of God's honor, violated by sin, and by just this satisfaction afforded to God for mankind, was the remission of punishment to be made possible" (Neander's Ch. Hist. Vol. IV., p. 500).

[10] "This avenging justice belongs to God as a judge, and he can no more dispense with it than he can cease to be a judge, or deny himself; though at the same time he exercises it freely. It does not consist in the exercise of a gratuitous power, like mercy, by which whether it be exercised or not, injustice is done to no one. It is that attribute by which God gives to every one his due, and from the exercise of which, when proper objects are presented, he can no more abstain, than he can do what is unjust. This justice is the constant will of punishing sinners, which in God cannot be inefficient, as his majesty is supreme and his power infinite" (Turretin's Atonement, Trans, by Wilson. New York, 1859). "So long as he is holy he must be just; he must repel sin, which is the highest idea we can form of punishment" (Hodge's Essays and Reviews, p. 137). "For whatever else God may be, or may not be, he must be just. It is not optional with him to exercise this attribute, or not to exercise it, as it is in the instance of that class of attributes which are antithetic to it. We can say: "God may be merciful or not as he pleases," but we cannot say: "God may be just or not, as he pleases. It cannot be asserted that God is

inexorably obligated to show pity; but it can be categorically affirmed that God is inexorably obligated to do justly" (Bib. Sacra, Vol. XVI., p. 738).

[11] Wilson's Trans, p. 17.

[12] Works, N. Y. Ed. Vol. IV., p. 150. While President Edwards the elder adopted in general the views and the language of the advocates of the satisfaction theory of the Atonement, his statements on the subject are not always self-consistent; and he elucidated principles and made distinctions which, in the minds of his distinguished son and other eminent disciples and successors, became the germs of a different theory.

[13] Symington on the Atonement, p. 190. N. Y. Ed. 1858.

[14] Hagenback, Vol. II., p. 342. Also Bauer on the Grotian Theory of the Atonement (Bib. Sacra, Vol. IX., p. 259).

[15] "Christ is as really the transgressor as the man that did commit it (sin) was, before he took it upon him." "Some have been ready to conceive that the word 'iniquity,' in the text (Isa. 53:5, 6), is spoken figuratively; 'iniquity,' that is, the punishment of it, was laid upon him; but see how careful the Spirit of God is, to take away all suspicion of a figure in the text; there are 'iniquity, transgression and sin,' -- three words, and all spoken to the same purpose, to confirm it" (Dr. Crisp's Ser. Vol. I., p. 430). "And this, no doubt, all the prophets did foresee in spirit, -- that Christ should become the greatest transgressor, murderer, adulterer, thief, rebel, blasphemer, that ever was or could be in the world." "If thou wilt deny him to be a sinner and accursed, deny also that he was crucified, and was dead." "But if it be not absurd to confess and believe that Christ was crucified between two thieves, then it is not absurd to say that he was accursed, and of all sinners the greatest." (Luther, Com. on Gal. 3:13).

[16] "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us. The law denounced a. punishment. This was its curse. Christ delivers us from that punishment by being made a curse; that is, by suffering an evil which, so far as the ends of the divine government are concerned, was equivalent to the execution of the curse of the law upon transgressors" (Dr. Woods's Works, Vol. IV., p. 72).

[17] Symington on the Atonement, p. 21.

[18] "The goodness of God comprehends all his attributes. All the acts of God are nothing else but the effluxes of his goodness, distinguished by several names, according to the objects it is exercised about; as the sea, though it be one mass of water, yet we distinguish it by several names, according to the shores it washes and beats upon, as the British and German ocean, though all be but one sea" (Charnock, "Attributes of God," Vol. II., p. 255). Making goodness synonymous with benevolence, or love, the above statement indicates a correct analysis of the divine character. "The attributes of God are not so many distinct qualities, but one perfection of excellence, diversified, in our conceptions, by the diversity of the objects towards which it is manifested" (Dr. Hodge's Essays and Reviews, p. 137). This is a felicitous statement of the truth provided that love or benevolence be that "one perfection of excellence."

[19] "But in order to a moral law there must be a penalty; otherwise it would be mere advice, but no law. In order to support the authority and vigor of this law, the penalty must be inflicted on transgressors." "This (the infliction of the penalty in case no atonement were made), I suppose would have been necessary to maintain the authority of the divine law" (Younger Edwards, Vol. II., pp. 14,15). "The sole end of the penalty then was to support the authority of the law, and to discover as much of God as such an expedient for such a purpose could reveal" (Dr. Griffin's Treatise on the Atonement, Chap. II). "The end aimed at in punishment is manifestly to display the moral character of God, to express his mind as to the goodness of his law, and the evil of sin, to support his government, and secure the highest welfare of his kingdom" (Dr. Woods's Works. Vol. II., p. 468).

[20] "Poenas infligere, aut a poenis aliquem liberare, quem punier possis, quod justificare vocat scriptura, non est nisi rectoris, qua talis, primo et per se, ut puta in familias patris, in republica regis, in universe Dei. Unde sequitur, omnino his Deum considerandum ut rectorem" (Grotius De Satisf. Cap. II., I, p. 34). "At jus puniendi non punientis causa, existit, sed causa communitatis alicujus" (Ibd. Cap. II., IX., p. 41).

[21] Dr. Woods's Works, Vol. II., p. 469.